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Hope A. Olson & John J. Boll's Subject Analysis in Online Catalogs, 2d ed. (book review)

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Subject Analysis in Online Catalogs. 2d ed. By Hope A. Olson and John J. Boll. Greenwood Village, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 2001. 333p. \$50 (ISBN 1-56308-800-2). www.lu.com

A lot has happened in the area of *Subject Analysis in Online Catalogs* since the first edition of this title was published in 1991. The widespread use of the Internet with its various search engines, the evolution of OPACs, and the creation of the MARC format for classification are the most evident of the multitude of changes interwoven throughout this second edition.

There is a logical flow to this book. It begins by describing the database itself, including the various MARC records within it. It then proceeds to cover the role of language in information retrieval, the vocabularies used in subject indexing, the specifics of Library of Congress and Medical Subject Headings (LCSH and MeSH), the theoretical basis of classification, the further potential for use of classification in OPACs, and the specifics of the Dewey Decimal (DDC) and Library of Congress (LCC) classifications. The authors lay the foundation for their conclusion that online catalogs must provide three

access options: controlled vocabulary, uncontrolled vocabulary (natural language or keyword), and classification. The authors then describe how to design online catalogs to help users cope with these sophisticated options. They do this in the final chapters by focusing on users and their needs, user-system interfaces, and evaluation of subject retrieval outcomes. The table of contents is very detailed and many of the chapters can stand on their own, particularly the more practice-oriented ones that explain, compare, and contrast LCSH with MeSH and DDC with LCC.

The balance of theory, practice, and documented research results is helpful for the most part, though perhaps slightly confusing at times. The inclusion of OPAC wishlists, areas warranting future research, and descriptions of new methods of conducting research are added bonuses. This book is easy to read because of its pleasant typeface. The index at the back is much more detailed and useful than that of the first edition. There are almost no typographical errors, although one did stand out. Reference is made twice to the "wildcat character" (55), when what is meant is "wildcard," which is the term used in the book's index. There are excellent bibliographies at the end of each chapter, many of which are quite extensive.

The stated target audience is students with some background in organizing information and "librarians interested in subject access in online catalogs and in the adaptation of traditional methods of subject analysis to new information technologies" (xiv). Hopefully this includes all librarians! As a cataloger, I found this work an excellent review of the rationale for the subject work catalogers do on a daily basis, namely assigning subject headings and call numbers. It is easy to let what we do and why we do it get lost in the never-ending flow of our work. But *Subject Analysis in Online Catalogs* serves as a timely reminder. All sorts of terms that compose the cataloger's

mantra are present in this title: accuracy, consistency, flexibility, structure, standards, control, and access. The authors put them in context and justify their importance, not only for catalogers but also for all librarians assisting users in searching online catalogs. Clearly our work is cut out for us, after all. "The contents of the collection, the indexing of the documents, the system, the users, and the searching are all factors that affect the subject retrieval process" (301). This complex interconnection should make all librarians proud of the successful subject searches that occur every day in online catalogs!—*Ellen McGrath, Head of Cataloging, Charles B. Sears Law Library, State University of New York at Buffalo*